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ABSTRACT

Teachers need training to work with community agencies to treat sexual abuse of children. They also need to develop the necessary skills to help sexually abused children overcome emotional trauma impeding effective learning. A survey was conducted to ascertain information on the extent of instruction and training of 510 teachers in the area of sexual abuse. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of a checklist designed to find the extent of professional preparation and instruction/training school personnel had in the area of sexually abused children. The second part of the questionnaire sought to determine the perceptions of the respondents toward instruction in the area of sexual abuse of children, parental education, and staff involvement in the training or delivery services. Results indicated a need for inservice workshops for teachers on sexual abuse, and inclusion of courses on the subject in schools of education training early childhood teachers. (JD)

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ALLEVIATE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN: TEACHERS CAN HELP

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SP 026116

ALLEVIATE SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN: TEACHERS CAN HELP

Statement of the Problem

Sexual abuse of young children is a national and international problem. It is estimated that in the United States alone, more than 500,000 children are victims of sexual abuse each year. Few of the offenders will be reported to anyone in authority.

The American Humane Association (AHA) publishes nationwide statistics on child abuse and neglect. These figures are collected from the fifty (50) states, which in turn get their figures each year by counting the cases that have been officially reported to each state's child protection authorities.

The American Humane Association's tally of sexual abuse cases reached a high of 22,918 in 1982. This is the most recent year for which statistics have been collected. It is believed that one out of every three (3) girls and one out of every six (6) boys will be sexually abused before the age of eighteen. The number of sexual abuse incidents not reported far exceeds the reported number of actual sexual abuse cases. Therefore, reliable statistics do not exist. However, the problem is crucial and needs the involvement of professionals in all fields. There should be a united effort to alleviate the suffering that children are experiencing as a result of sexual abuse.

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The subject of sexual abuse has always been a most difficult topic for discussion by parents, teachers, and administrators because of their own personal feelings of being inadequate to use the appropriate techniques in approaching the problem. However, educators can no longer avoid involvement. This situation is so severe that it is affecting over one-third of the student population.

Few classroom teachers have been trained to detect indications of sexual abuse in children. However, teachers have discovered that much of their education has been directed toward planning meaningful learning activities and preparation of the whole child concept. However, recent reports indicate that there is an epidemic of sexually abused children in America, which seems to be a common phenomenon.

Teachers need training to work with community agencies to treat sexual abuse. They also need to develop the necessary skills to help sexually abused children overcome emotional trauma impeding effective learning.

One of the major reasons for teachers' limited involvement is a lack of available training and knowledge. In view of the legal responsibilities and the potential of schools in aiding in the identification and secondary prevention of the problem, it is important that teachers receive necessary training in child abuse with a focus

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on sexual abuse.

According to Suchara, most teachers who are teaching today were trained from textbooks which failed to take the proper cognizance of the sexual abuse problem of children; it means that knowledge for identifying and receiving the maltreated child will require a new orientation and type of dedication so as to ensure that children experience human treatment and that humaneness be nurtured in them.[35]

The American educational system needs to develop policies and programs regarding sexual abuse of children to successfully reduce the incidence of sexual abuse of children for the human benefits to children and families.

Purpose of the Study

This study was conducted because the problem of sexual abuse of children is so widespread and because the solution the problem partly rests with all professionals providing human services. The American teacher becomes partly responsible for the reduction of such incidents. In 1984, it was estimated that more than 500,000 children would be victims of sexual abuse in the United States.

American teachers render human services to children. Therefore, training in the area of sexual abuse is appropriate in an attempt to alleviate the problem.

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This study was an analysis of the problem of sexually abused children in the elementary grades. There was a specific effort to ascertain information on the extent of instruction and training of teachers in the areas of sexual abuse.

Data was collected through a questionnaire. The data was classified, analyzed, and summarized to draw inferences for a teacher-training program. An overriding aim of the study has been the ultimate prevention and intervention of sexual abuse of children. The instrument was divided into three parts.

Part I of the questionnaire consisted of a checklist type of questions designed to ascertain the extent of professional preparation and instruction/training in the area of sexual abuse of children.

Part II of the questionnaire was a four-point Likert-type summation scale, which consisted of four statements designed to determine the perceptions of the respondents toward instruction in the area of sexual abuse of children; parental education instruction; staff involvement in the training or delivery services.

1. Have you attended any workshops or seminars on sexual abuse of young children:

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	72	14.11
No	404	99.23
No Response	34	6.66
Total	510	100.00

N = 510

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Table 1 questions indicated the frequency of attendance at workshops and seminars in sexually abused young children. Eighty-four (40%) of the participants indicated no sexual abuse seminars taken and seventy-two (16%) indicated that they had taken seminars.

Table 2

2. Are you knowledgeable about the state's requirements for educators to report suspected cases of any type of child abuse and neglect?

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	340	67
No	152	30
No Response	18	3
Total	510	100

N = 510

Table 2, question 2 shows the educators' knowledge about the state's requirements in reporting suspected cases of any type of child abuse and neglect. Three-hundred and forty (69%) indicated they are knowledgeable about state requirements for education to report and one-hundred and fifty-two (31%) indicated that they were not knowledgeable about state requirements for reporting child abuse and neglect.

Table 3

3. In the duration of your teaching experience, have you had a student in any of your classes that you suspected was or had been sexually abused?

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Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	180	35
No	330	64
No Response	0	0
Total	510	510

N = 510

Table 3, question 1 indicates the number of students in classes that are suspected of child abuse. Three-hundred thirty (64%) of the teachers indicated no student was suspected of child abuse and neglect and one-hundred eighty (35%) of teachers responded yes.

Table 4

Have you experienced any difficulty in the teacher/student relationship upon awareness of the sexual abuse problem?

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	60	11.77
No	155	30.39
No Response	295	57.84
Total	510	100.00

N = 510

Table 4, question 4 indicates the amount of difficulty in the teacher/student relationship awareness of the sexual abuse problem. Sixty (26%) indicated difficulty and one-hundred fifty five (74%) indicated no difficulty in relationship with students upon awarness of the sexual abuse problem.

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Table 5

Have you experienced any problems in coping with your emotional feelings (i.e. hurt) for your student?

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	85	16.66
No	152	29.82
No Response	273	53.52
Total	510	100.00

N = 510

Table 5, question 5 indicated frequency of responses in number of educators who experienced any problems in coping with their emotional feelings. Eighty-five (64%) of the teachers responded that no sutdent was suspected and one-hundred eighty (35%) of teachers responded yes to the question.

Table 6

Do you feel your teacher-preparation program has equipped you with the necessary skills to recognize and identify characteristics of a sexually abused child?

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	72	14.1
No	402	78.0
No Response	36	8.0
Total	510	100.0

N = 510

Table 6, question 6 asked for teacher-preparation programs which equipped the educator with skills to recognize and identify characteristics of sexually abused

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children. Four-hundred seventy-four (71%) answered no, they did not feel prepared, and seventy-two (29%) answered yes they did feel prepared to identify sexually abused children.

Table 7

Tables 7 through 10 indicate a summary of the breakdown of responses to questions. These questions are related to attitudes of educators on enrolling in courses in sexual abuse of young children.

Table 7, question 7 shows the total number of responses: one hundred fifteen (44.2%) strongly agree, one-hundred twenty-two (47%) agree, twenty (7%) disagree with the statement and three (1%) strongly disagree.

Table 7

Response	Number	Percentage
Strongly Agree	115	23
Agree	122	24
Disagree	20	4
No Response	253	49
Total	510	100

N = 510

Table 7, question 1 shows that of the total responses, eighty-one (30%) strongly agreed, one-hundred fifty (57%) agreed, thirty-five (12.8%) disagreed and four (1.0%) strongly disagreed with the statement, "Parent education is a necessary class subject for potential teachers."

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Item 2, Table 8

Parent education is a necessary class subject for potential teachers

Table 8

Response	Number	Percentage
Strongly Agree	81	16
Agree	150	30
Disagree	35	6
Strongly Disagree	4	1
No Response	240	47
Total	510	100

N = 510

Table 9

Table 9, question 3 shows that of the total number of respondents, one-hundred seventy (60%) strongly agree, one-hundred five (37%) agree, seven (2%) disagreed and one (1%) strongly disagreed. Staff should be involved in the training or delivery services of sexual abuse instructions.

Staff should be involved in the training or delivery services of sexual abuse instructions

Response	Number	Percentage
Strongly Agree	170	33
Agree	105	20
Disagree	7	1
Strongly Disagree	1	0
Total	510	100

N = 510

Table 10, question 4 shows that of the total number of respondents, one-hundred fifty-five (59%) strongly agree, one-hundred (38%) agree, seven (2%) disagree and one (1%)

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strongly disagreed with the statements. The staff should be informed of potential consequences of reporting all types of child abuse.

Item 4. Staff should be informed of potential consequences of reporting all types of child abuse.

Response	Number	Percentage
Strongly Agree	155	30
Agree	100	20
Disagree	7	1
Strongly Disagree	1	1
No Response	247	48
Total	510	100

N = 510

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the findings in this study, the following conclusions are drawn about percentage of school aged children that are being sexually abused in the five parishes McNeese State University serves.

The training provided for teachers was also considered in this study.

1. The majority of the teachers have no form of formal instruction in sexual abuse of young children.
2. Much of the information about the state's requirements on sexual abuse emphasized the legal responsibilities of teachers. However, there was not any information provided for prevention or intervention for classroom activities.

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3. A larger percentage of the teachers involved in the study have experienced having sexually abused students in their classrooms.
4. Many of the teachers experienced difficulty in functioning effectively in the teacher/student relationship with students they suspect are being sexually abused.
5. Teachers expressed having experienced problems in coping with their emotional feelings because of their quest to aid the child.
6. The majority of the teachers did not feel equipped with the necessary skills to recognize and identify characteristics of a sexually abused child. Many expressed an interest in learning how to identify and support these children.

When an opinion inventory was taken of the teachers which related to attitudes of educators on enrolling in courses in sexual abuse of young children, the responses of the educators was as follows:

When asked if educators should be required to take courses emphasizing sexual abuse of young children, 24% of those surveyed agreed that they should take courses, 30% of the participants agreed that parent education is a necessary subject for potential teachers. Thirty percent of the educators strongly agreed that the staff should be

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involved in the training or sexual abuse instruction and 30% strongly agreed that educators should be informed of potential consequences of reporting all types of sexual abuse cases.

On many of the questions in the opinion inventory, there was an average of 40% no respondes which seemed to indicate a reluctance of educators to commit themselves to this growing problem which makes education for educators even more critical because of the seriousness of this problem.

We, as a scoiety, can no longer overlook the importance of this problem or the significance of its radifications on our children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended:

1. That specific courses or workshops on sexual abuse be offered as required experiences for teachers of young children in high risk school areas.
2. That accrediting associations consider inclusion of such requirements among their standards for approval of teacher education programs which prepare early childhood specialists.
3. That the family-life education emphasis and the parent education emphasis be expanded in early childhood teacher preparation programs as a means of prevention of further child sexual abuse.

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4. That the professional training sequences related to child abuse and sexual abuse in early childhood education programs be further developed to include comprehensive laboratory experiences.
5. That teacher-education programs design patterns in which parents and teachers develop coalitions for prevention of sexual abuse.
6. That the quantity of learning experiences by teachers regarding sexual abuse be included in course work, laboratory experiences, and active research.

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